

THE MEDLEVAL BACKGROUND

7

sideration. The emergence of an objective and passionless economic science took place more slowly than the corresponding movement in the theory of the State, because the issues were less absorbing, and, while one marched in the high lights of the open stage, the other lurked on the back stairs and in the wings. It was not till a century after Machiavelli had emancipated the State from "religion, that the doctrine of the self-contained department with laws of its own begins generally to be applied to the world of business relations, and, even in the England of the early seventeenth century, to discuss questions of economic organization purely in terms of pecuniary profit and loss still wears an air of not quite reputable cynicism* When the sixteenth century opens, not only political but social theory is saturated with doctrines drawn from the sphere of ethics and religion, and economic phenomena are expressed in terms of personal conduct, as naturally and inevitably as the nineteenth century expressed them in terms of mechanism.

Not the least fundamental of divisions among theories of society is between those which regard the world of human affairs as self-contained, and those which appeal

to a supernatural criterion. Modern social theory,

like modern political theory, develops only when society is given ^naturalistic instead of a religious explanation, and a capital fact which presides at the birth of both is a change in the conception held of the nature and functions of a Church. The crucial period is the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The most important arena (apart from Holland) is England, because it is in England, with its new geographical position as the entrepdt. between Europe and America, its achievement of internal economic unity two centuries before France and two and a half centuries before Germany, its constitutional revolution, and its powerful *bourgeoisie* of bankers, ship-owners, and merchants, that the transformation of the structure